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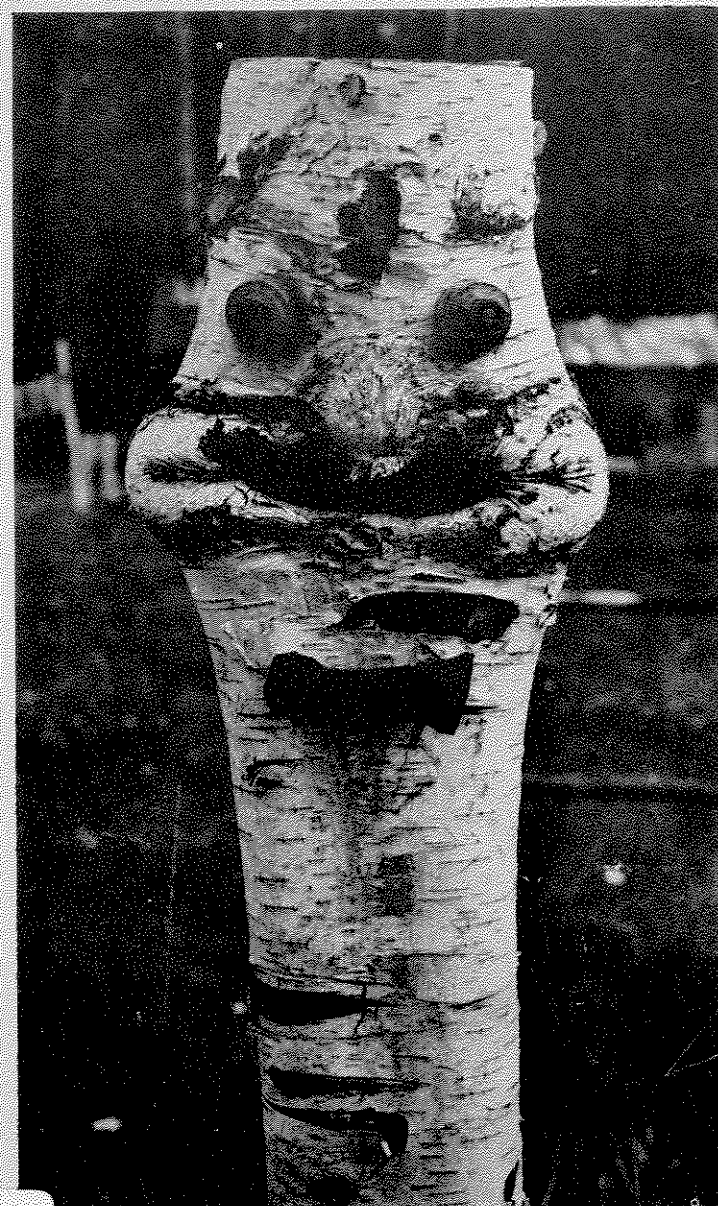
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ES MY GRANNY TOLD ME . . .



FORT McKAY

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STORIES MY GRANNY TOLD ME

Stories, Tales, Legends, Poems
 Collected by the Young People of Fort McKay.

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STORIES MY GRANNY TOLD ME

INTRODUCTION

"Stories My Granny Told Me" is a collection of short tales written by the young people of Fort McKay over the period of the last two or three years. Most of these stories were passed on to the students by their mothers and grandmothers and were told in a traditional setting. In most instances they were originally told in Cree and Chipewyan, the native languages of Fort McKay and then translated into English by the authors of this book. Very little editing has been done in order that the essence of the tales would not be lost. Some original stories and poems have also been included.

This collection is by no means complete. There has been no attempt to transcribe all the stories told in Fort McKay; this book contains a mere sampling.

The art work which appears in this book has been done by the authors and their younger compatriots. Unless otherwise noted the photographs were taken and developed by the authors.

We would like to thank Mrs. Alice Boucher and Mrs. Emma Faichney for their assistance as advisors and the Fort McMurray 75th Anniversary Committee for the funding which made this publication possible.

Fort McKay, Alberta
August, 1980

CONTRIBUTORS

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ADVISORS

Mrs. Alice Boucher, Mrs. Emma Faichney, Sharon Jo Scott, Rod Hyde

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Aerial view of the north side of Fort McKay.
The Athabasca River is in the background.

MY COMMUNITY

My community is made up of Cree, Chipewyan and Whites. The two kinds of Indians are Treaties and Metis. The population is about 225 - 250 people. The houses we live in are old or new houses. Some people have trailers. There are still a few log houses.

The services we get around here are quite lots. The police come about three or four times a week. The nurse comes every two weeks. The bookmobile also comes every two weeks. We have a big school and a church. The mail comes in two times a week. There are telephones now in the community.

The recreation facilities we have around here are: sports, bingos, a rink and a recreation committee. Older people use the gym in the school twice a week. The students of the school run movies for the village.

The working conditions of the people around here are pretty poor, because the people don't have the education. The jobs that some people get are labourers, operators, janitors, trappers and a manager's job. Many people work at Suncor and Syncrude and Catalytic as well as other construction jobs.





WESAKYCHAK

Wesakychak is a traditional character in Cree storytelling. He is a creature of the woods and a friend and compatriot of everyone including the animals and the trees. Wesakychak is no hero but rather a sly trickster who sometimes wins but just as often loses. Wesakychak may be lazy but he is also very smart.

More complete collections of the tales of Wesakychak are available elsewhere but we offer a sampling here of the legends found in Fort McKay.

WESAKYCHAK AND THE BLINDFOLD DANCE

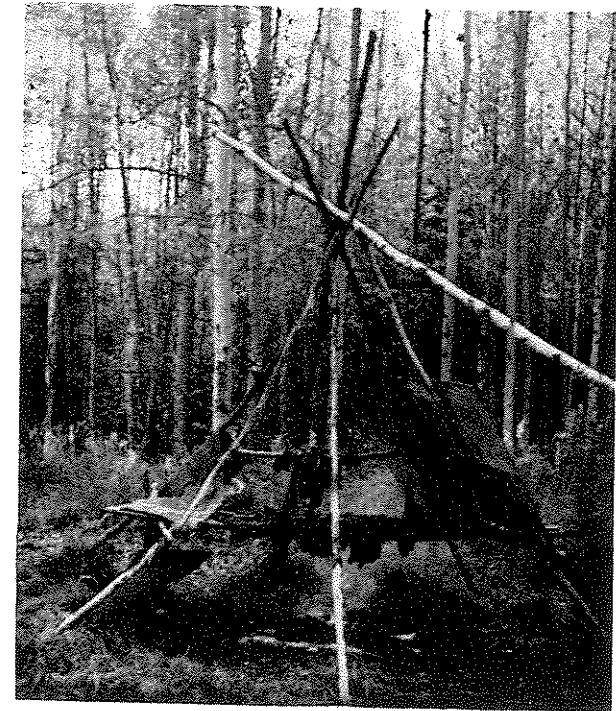
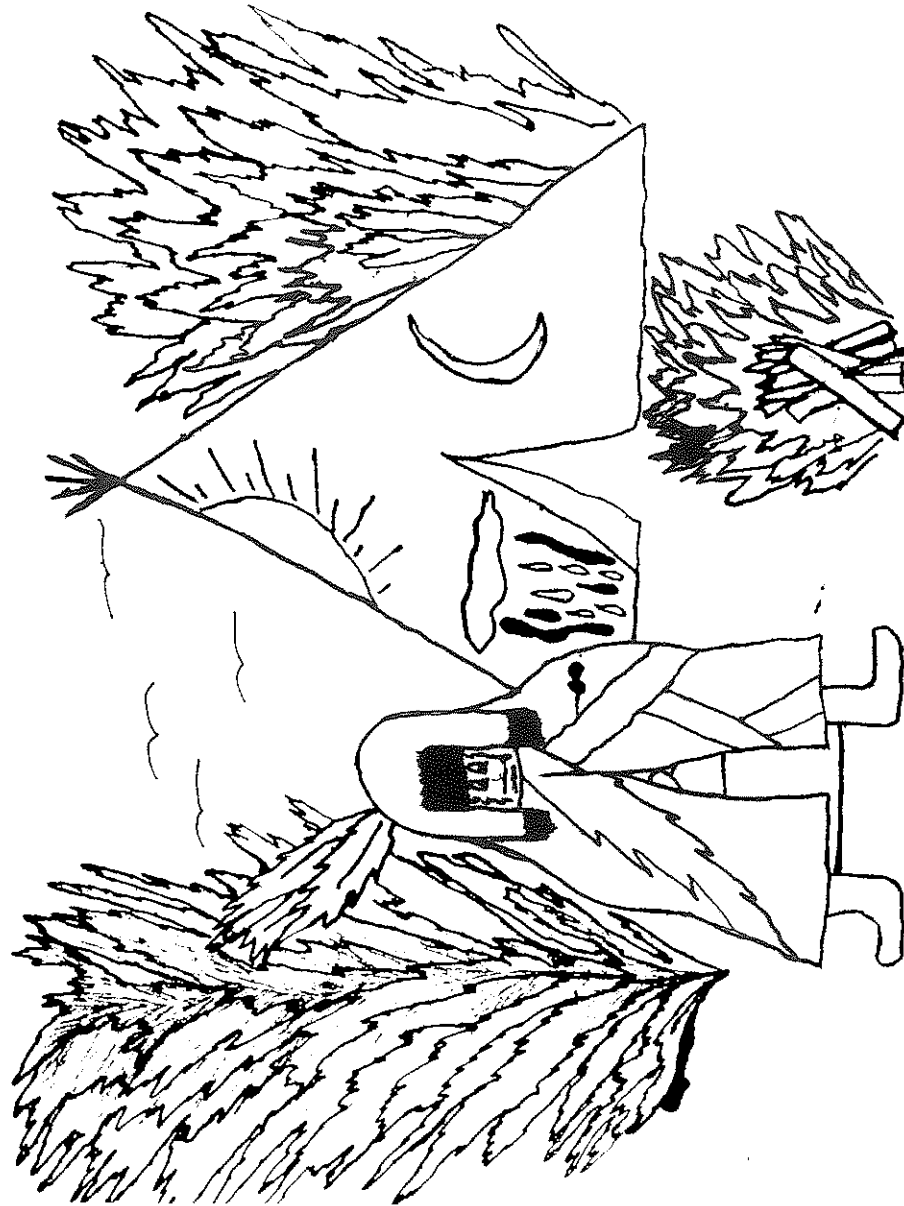
Once upon a time Wesakychak saw lots of ducks, geese, mudhens, swans and some whooping cranes. He said "My brothers, you will be gone all winter. I won't be seeing you so I want to invite you to have a blindfold dance at 6:00 p.m. sharp." Then Wesakychak went and made a spruce house. When the geese, ducks, cranes, etc. came he put blindfolds on the birds. He told them if they peeked they would spoil the dance. So he started to play music and they started to dance. He started to kill them one by one. He had killed lots of birds when one mudhen spied through the blindfold. She yelled, "Wesakychak is killing us!" The rest of the birds flew away. Then Wesakychak made a big fire and put all the ducks, geese and cranes on it. When he was full he buried all the birds under the ground.

He started to walk through the forest then he saw brother fox. He told him that he had lots of ducks at his camp. "Would you like to race me over there? Who ever gets there first gets to eat them all." "Oh", said the fox, "My leg is broken. I can't run." Wesakychak said, "I will tie a big rock to my leg to make us even, then we will race." So Wesakychak did. After the fox saw him do it the fox ran to the camp and ate up the ducks. When Wesakychak got there he found no ducks left. The next day Wesakychak saw the fox. He built a big bonfire around the fox. The fire got bigger so the fox's fur got burnt all over. He was all burnt so the fox never lied again and Wesakychak was happy.

WESAKYCHAK AND THE DRY MEAT

One night I slept overnight with my Granny and my Granny told me about Wesakychak. She said that if Wesakychak eats ootin-eyuk, (rosebuds) he will fart a lot. If he is going to shoot he will fart and he will scare the animals away and he won't kill anything.

One day Wesakychak went and gathered some wood to make a fire. He put rocks on the fire and made them really hot and red. Then by mistake he sat on it and he burned his bum. It really hurt him bad. Where he was burned his skin turned into a scab, and it was really sore when he sat down. Finally the skin dried up and started to peel off. While he was walking through the forest, his scab fell off but Wesakychak didn't know it. On his way back he found his scab and told himself that he had found some dry meat. When Wesakychak started eating what he thought was dry meat the birds told him, "Oh-maa-gee-mee-jit". (You are eating your scab.) They started to laugh at him. They made Wesakychak mad. Then Wesakychak started crying all the way home.



Smoking Dry Meat



HOW THE BIRCH GOT THEIR MARKINGS

Wesakychak had a bear that he wanted to eat. He wanted to empty his stomach, so he asked the birch trees to hug him tightly. Then the trees played a trick on Wesakychak and wouldn't let him go. When he finally got free he was really angry with Was - squay (Birch tree). So Wesakychak got a whip and he whipped the tree. That is why the birch trees have black markings all over.

WESAKYCHAK AND THE LITTLE BIRDS

One day Wesakychak was walking through the woods when he came upon a nest of little birds. He saw they were defenseless and threw shit on them. Then he continued down the path and came upon a big stream. Two times he made a big run first to jump over the stream and chickened out before he jumped. The third time he ran fast and jumped and then in the middle of the stream the parents of the little birds flew out and scared Wesakychak and he fell splat into the water! The moral of the story is don't throw shit on little birds for one day they will grow up and could scare you.

N.B. This story was told to Sharon by a Metis friend in Fort McMurray. It toured as a play in the summer of 1979.

WESAKYCHAK AND THE RUN AWAY DOOR

Once upon a time Geesha and his brother Wesakychak were in a king's palace. There was going to be a big feast that night. Geesha told Wesakychak that he would kick his leg under the table when Wesakychak had eaten enough. So at the big feast a dog walked under the table and kicked Wesakychak in the leg so he stopped eating, although he was still hungry.

After the feast when everybody was sleeping Wesakychak went and looked for stuff in the cupboard. He spilled jam all over the princess and at the same time he got jam all over his head. After he got the jam out of his hair he dropped the bottle and broke it. He ran outside and at the same time he broke the door open and he ran for a few hours carrying the door. He climbed up a tree and sat there with the door. There were robbers under the tree. Wesakychak wanted to go to the bathroom and at the same time the robbers wanted to have a drink of water. Wesakychak went to the bathroom and the robbers said Mugino the devil is giving us a drink of water. The robbers wanted to eat and Wesakychak was still going to the bathroom. The robbers said Mugino is giving us something to eat. Then Wesakychak let go of the door and the robbers said the devil is trying to kill us. The robbers ran away afraid and left all their money behind. Then Wesakychak said "Jokes" and kept the money for himself.

* Editors note: The expression "Jokes" means not serious, just kidding.

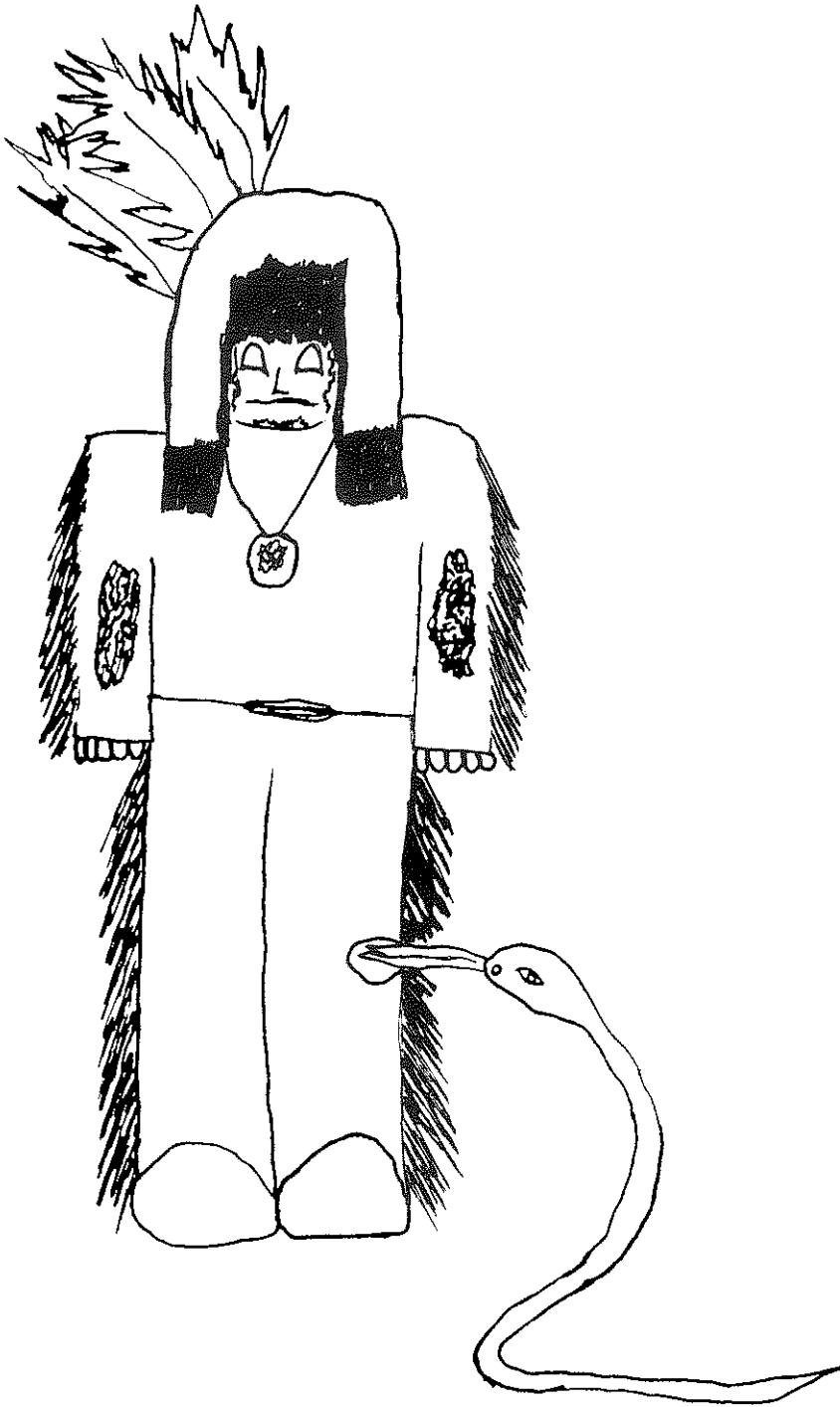


HOW WESAKYCHAK MADE MOSS

One morning Wesakychak woke up with a very sore back. He sat and reasoned with himself for almost a hour and then finally made up his mind to do something about the pain. He decided to give the Great Manitou a gift. He remembered he had seen a patch of berries. He picked a lot of berries and took them to the "Mountain of Hope". The Great Manitou was pleased with Wesakychak's gift. He had seen Wesakychak shivering with cold and thought that Wesakychak had given him some berries because Wesakychak wanted some coal.

The next morning Wesakychak woke up and was astonished to see that black coal was everywhere. The coal gave him a sore back even worse than before and boy was Wesakychak ever angry! He decided to have his revenge on the Great Manitou. He saw a green lizard and turned it into a chunk of meat. He returned to the Mountain of Hope and left the chunk of meat and quietly crept away. Manitou found the meat and thought it was a thank-you gift from Wesakychak. He decided to eat it for lunch. Just as he was eating the chunk of meat the spell wore off and the Manitou found himself chomping on a green lizard's tail! Yyyeekkk! All the Manitou could think about was paying Wesakychak back for this trick. He began to feel something like a stomach ache coming on. An idea came to him and he went to the edge of the mountain and bent over and SHIT!!! Green soft shit came out and it was runny and went down the Mountain of Hope and slid all through the woods. Wesakychak thought it was a gift so he called it moss (estas-squamgya). When ever you see moss it has to be by mud and water so it will be healthy.

N.B. This story is original, having been created by one of the young authors of this book and is in the true tradition of story telling.



WETIGO AND THE MEDICINE MAN

There was once a little village deep in the woods. The people who lived there never let the women leave camp because there was a fierce monster named Wetigo who was a cannibal.

One night while everybody was sleeping except the medicine man and the chief, Wetigo decided to go and have some roasted human. So he went and killed ten people. After all the action was over the Medicine man and the chief followed Wetigo's tracks.

When they came upon Wetigo he was starting up a fire. While the fire was burning Wetigo roasted an Indian woman on a big forked shaped stick.

When the woman was cooked Wetigo started eating the Woman. When he was finished eating he fell asleep. While he was asleep the men grabbed Wetigo and chopped his head off. From that day on Wetigo was never heard of again.



WHY THE BEAR HAS A SHORT TAIL

One day, Muskwa bear was very hungry. He was walking along the river bank when he saw a fox put his tail in the water and use it to catch fish. So the bear tried to catch some fish the same way. He didn't catch any fish right away. The bear fell asleep with his tail in the water. That night the water in the river froze. The next morning when the bear woke up he couldn't get his tail out of the water. He called the moose and the other animals to pull him out. They pulled so hard that his tail snapped off. From that day on the bear has had a small tail.



HOW THE SKUNK GOT IT'S STRIPES

One day a skunk (cee-gawg) was walking down the road. He was hungry and spotted a bear. The bear was eating a fish. The skunk thought the bear was friendly, so he walked right up to him. The bear yelled and the skunk started to run away. The bear just caught the skunk on the back with his claws. From that day on the skunk has had a stripe down it's back and never asks any bear for any food.





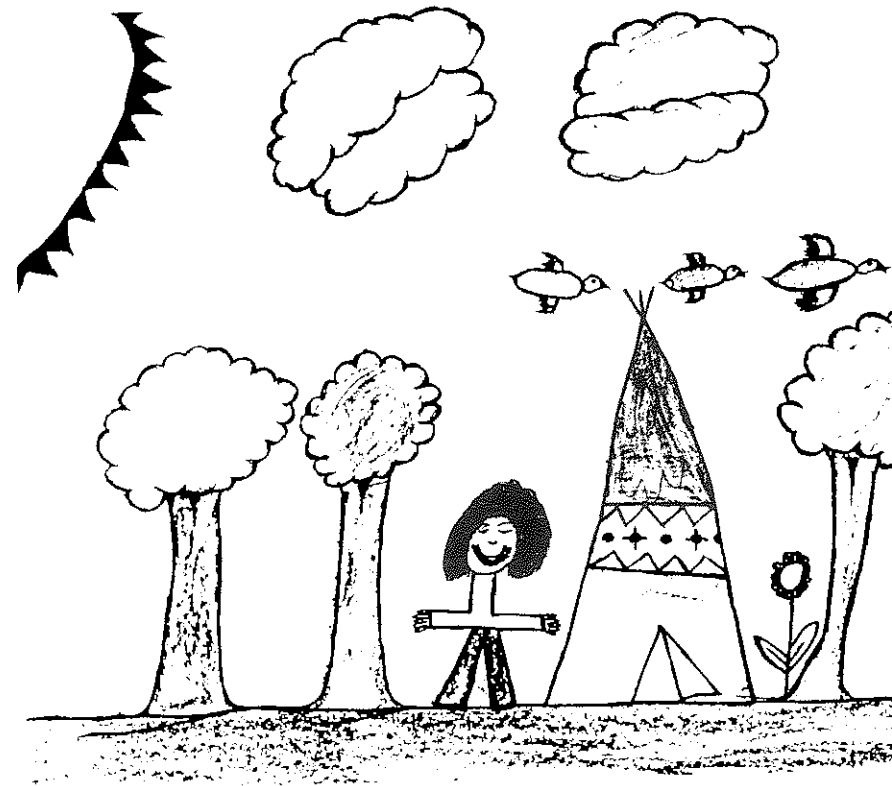
WHY THE OCEAN IS SALTY

There was a skunk (muh-ces-ceegawg) as big as a bear. He killed lots of animals. He let go of his poison and all the trees died. If the animals smelled it they died. One day the skunk was following the animals because he knew where the animals were. He caught up to a wolverine and said that he would kill him. He grabbed the wolverine and threw him far away into the trees. As soon as the skunk was out of sight the wolverine ran and told the animals ahead of time to get ready for the skunk. They got ready and they dug holes and some got ready to squirt grease. The one that was leading said, "the one who has the sharpest teeth should bite the skunk's sack". The wolverine had the best teeth so he was chosen. They all got ready. Some put grease in their teeth and then the skunk came along. He was already turning around and his tail was going up. He was just ready to spray all over the animals when the wolverine jumped at the sack and broke the sack with his teeth. Then all the animals fought the skunk and they killed it. The wolverine took off to find water to wash his eyes and mouth. He found the ocean and washed his eyes and mouth in the ocean water.

That is why we cannot drink ocean water from that day on.



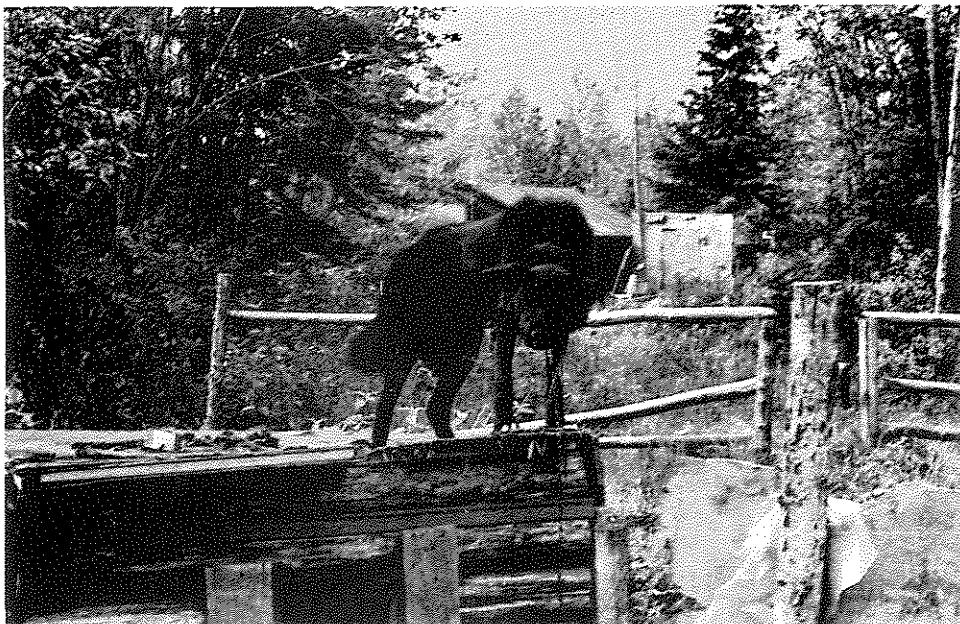
Dredge parked at Fort McKay



HOW THE BIRD GOT BACK HIS FEATHER

Once upon a time there was an old, old man who lived in a very old log house. One day when he was going for a walk, he saw a bird. The bird was acting sad so the old man said he wished all animals could talk so that he could find out why. All of a sudden the bird started to talk! He said, "I am sad because I lost my one and only beautiful feather and I can't seem to find it". The man told the bird not to be sad anymore. He said, "Tell me where you lost your feather and I will go look for it". The man left the bird there and went walking down the road. He found a box full of Cree medicine and took it home. When he got home he made a beautiful feather that looked just like the one that the bird had lost.

The next day the old man went and put the feather in the bird's nest. When the bird went back to his nest he saw the feather. He was so happy that he didn't know what to do. The bird knew that the old man used some kind of medicine because he saw him in the bushes with the box.



HOW DOGS LOST THEIR VOICE

A long time ago in McKay before dogs lost their voices, they used to talk to people. One day an old lady had to go to the bathroom really badly, so she took a pail from inside her house and took it outside. When she went to the bathroom outside, she filled the pail half full. After she finished she called some dogs over because she had no place to throw the shit in her pail. A couple of dogs came along and they said, "What in the world is in this pail?" The old lady said, "It's something good for you to eat". In those days dogs ate only meat. The dogs smelled the pail and started eating the shit inside it. After they finished they tried to say, "That was fantastic!" but they couldn't say it because they couldn't talk any more. Since that day dogs cannot talk but they will eat anything at all in the world.

THE LITTLE BOY FROM THE CARIBOU TURD

Once upon a time, there were a lot of people who lived upon Caribou. There was this old lady who was living among these people. She didn't have a family because she wasn't married. She only had two brothers and her dad so when they killed Caribous she had to work hard to get a piece of meat because she didn't have no one to work for her.

Then one day towards spring, they heard a little baby crying all day. A couple of women went and checked but they didn't find anything. The old lady who was living among those people went and checked. She moved a piece of caribou turd and found a little boy no bigger than her thumb. So everybody called the little boy Caribou Turd.

They lived like that for two or three years and the little boy did not grow much more than about ten inches long. The little boy liked to eat best the bone marrow from baby caribou. One day the people killed a lot of caribou and the old lady went and worked to get some to eat. But one day they wouldn't let the old lady have any bone marrow from the caribou because they were jealous of the little boy. When the old lady came back, she told the little boy that she couldn't bring any bone marrow back. Then the little boy started crying for three days and was saying all of them will starve to death. The old lady said, "How about my two brothers"? He said, "When they just about starve to death they will find a hibernating bear and kill it and the bear will be skinny and they will survive by eating the bear."

Everybody left and the little boy said, "Let's not go with them; we will go somewhere else". So his granny put on his flying squirrel coat and they left the other way. They were hungry because they didn't have nothing to eat. They stopped at a place where there was a small pond and the little boy said, "Granny, you should try and catch some fish", because they were hungry. All of a sudden the little boy started yelling, "Granny something is coming with lots of dots!" The old lady caught a big jackfish. Again the little boy started yelling, "Hey Granny, somebody is coming with lots of fringes on him". The old lady caught a big Mirea (eel).

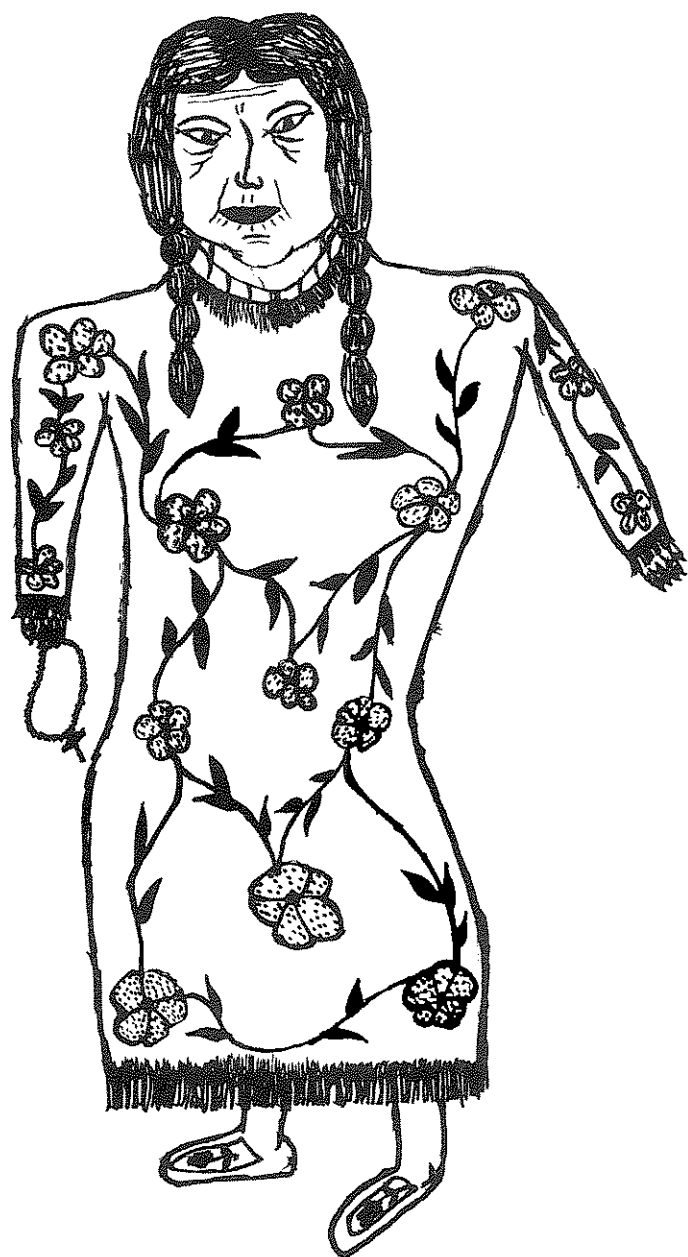
Then they moved further on and made camp. The little boy was playing around and all of a sudden the little boy disappeared and was gone all night. All of a sudden he came back and his bow and arrows were filled with blood. His granny took off his belt and lots of little pieces of caribou tongue were there. He

said, "Granny, we will move tomorrow. I killed some caribou." I guess he knew where the old lady's brothers and Dad were. They were the only ones surviving and all the others were starving to death.

That little boy was a caribou spirit and he turned himself into caribou and bothered those other guys all the time. Then one day the father told his sons to go and track that little caribou. The little boy wished the old lady had not been human. Those guys tracked the caribou and then they saw the little boy and followed him. The little boy poked his feet inside the cave and there was a starving bear inside there. The old lady's two brothers found the starving old bear inside the cave and took it home. The next day they tracked the little caribou tracks and all of a sudden there were no caribou tracks but only little snowshoe tracks. They tracked the little boy's tracks to their sister's camp.

The old lady got sick and she died. The little boy went out from there and then at the doorstep the boy's footprints turned into Caribou tracks and he was never heard of or seen again.





THE OLD LADY AND HER GRANDCHILD

Once upon a time, an old lady lived in a teepee by herself. She was too old to help her tribe making mooswa-ba-keegan (moosehide). One day when the younger members of her tribe were making mooswa-ba-keegan, she just watched. When they were finished she was given only a piece of the neck to eat. She went to her home and kept it under her pillow to protect it. This little piece of food would have to last the old lady a long time. She woke up the next morning and heard a baby crying. She was very surprised when she looked under her pillow and there lay a baby. The baby grew up to be a boy and he looked after the old lady until she died. Then one day the young boy disappeared and was never seen again. Some say he went back to his herd.



THE HAT, THE SACK AND THE AXE

There was an old man who always got bothered by the devil (ma-ji-mento). One day an angel came to visit him. The angel told him that he could have three wishes. So he said, "I want a hat that is magic so if I throw it that's where I will be standing and I want a sack and an axe." So the angel gave him what he wanted. Then one night the devil was looking through the window so he threw his hat beside the devil so that's where he was standing. He hit the devil on the head with an axe and threw him in the sack. Then he took the sack and threw it in the river. So from then on he never saw the devil again.

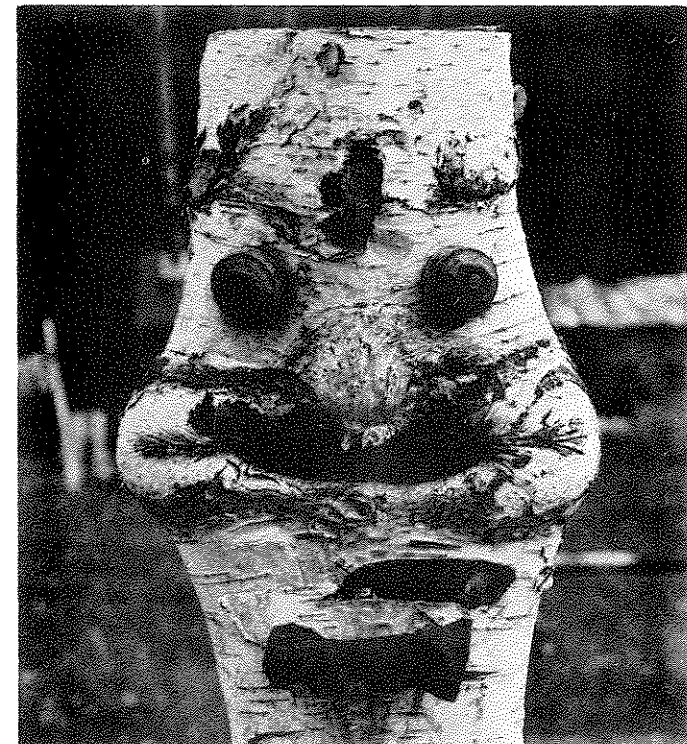
When the old man died he went to hell and the devil ran away from him so the old man went to heaven. He saw the holy spirit there and the holy spirit said, "I'm sorry, you may not come in." So the old man said, "Can I look in? I just want to see how heaven looks." So the angel opened the door a little and the man squashed his hat and threw it in so now the old man is in heaven.



THE KING AND THE MAGIC MAN

Once upon a time there was this King who was greedy for gold. This one man came and he asked the king if he could sleep at his palace. The King said no. Then the man went to an old lady and an old man. He asked them if he could sleep there and they said yes so the man slept there overnight. The next day the man said to the old couple, "The first thing that you start doing that's what you will do all day." So the old woman started sewing. She sewed all day and she had lots of clothes. She sold lots of clothes and made a lot of money. The King asked the old folks where they got all the clothes.

The next year the King saw the same man who had treated the old couple so nicely. The King gave the man a good breakfast and sure enough the man told the King that whatever he started doing he would do all day. So the King decided he would count his gold. The King needed to go to the bathroom so he figured that after he went to the bathroom he would count his gold. He went to the bathroom and he couldn't stop until he had flooded his whole kingdom.





POEMS AND STORIES I MADE UP BY MYSELF.



WHEN I LOOK IN THE WOODS

When I look in the woods I see many different things,
I see the small trees as they sprout from the ground,

I see the birds as they play with one another,
I see the snow that coats the ground to keep it warm.

I see the rabbits hop around looking for a place to go.
All of these things bring good feelings to me.

THE WOLF

Long ago there was a group of white men who came north with a pack of dogs. One day these men went out hunting and they tied their dogs up with rope. When the hunters were away a hungry bear came to their camp. The dogs were so frightened they got loose. When the hunters got back their dogs were gone. They kept running until they realized that they were lost. These dogs were white man's dogs. They had a hard time to survive but they did survive and they grew bigger than they were supposed too. The dogs got wild and bigger and when people saw them they didn't know what to call them, so they called them wolves.

From that day on when a wolf hears or sees a human he starts to cry for he remembers his masters.

THE TRAPPER

As the trapper wakes
He hears the cry of the wolf
That makes him alert



Photo courtesy of Emma Faichney

LIFE IN THE BUSH

Life in the bush is like a long holiday away from school but you have to get up earlier in the bush. When you first get up you have to make a fire and melt snow to make tea. After you finish eating you go and check your snares and stay on the trap line just about all day. If you catch a lynx, beaver or any other animals, you skin and dry them. If you have time you do your homework. You start all over the next day.

BALD

One day I woke up in the morning. I washed my face and just when I was going to comb my hair, I looked in the mirror. "No hair!" I screamed. I went back to bed to cover up and called my dad. I never went to school that day and at night I went to visit Rod and ask him for advice. He said, "Don't be shy, that is your normal look, I think."

The next year when I was in town, a guy from Hollywood saw me and asked me if I wanted to be a movie star. The first show I made was about Kojak Junior.

I went to bed the next day and when I woke up I had all my hair back. I got fired and lived the normal me.

THE DAY I MET A SASQUACH

One day I was reading a book. When I finished I got up to drink some water. I saw a big ugly brown thing looking at me from the window. Then I started to run and scream. I tried to run as fast as I could but he caught up to me and grabbed me. Then he said to me, "Where are you going?" I told him that I was running away from him. He said, "Ha Ha." And he let me go. Then he went walking towards the bush.

I went home and finished reading the book I had been reading before.

THE DAY I MET THE SASQUACH

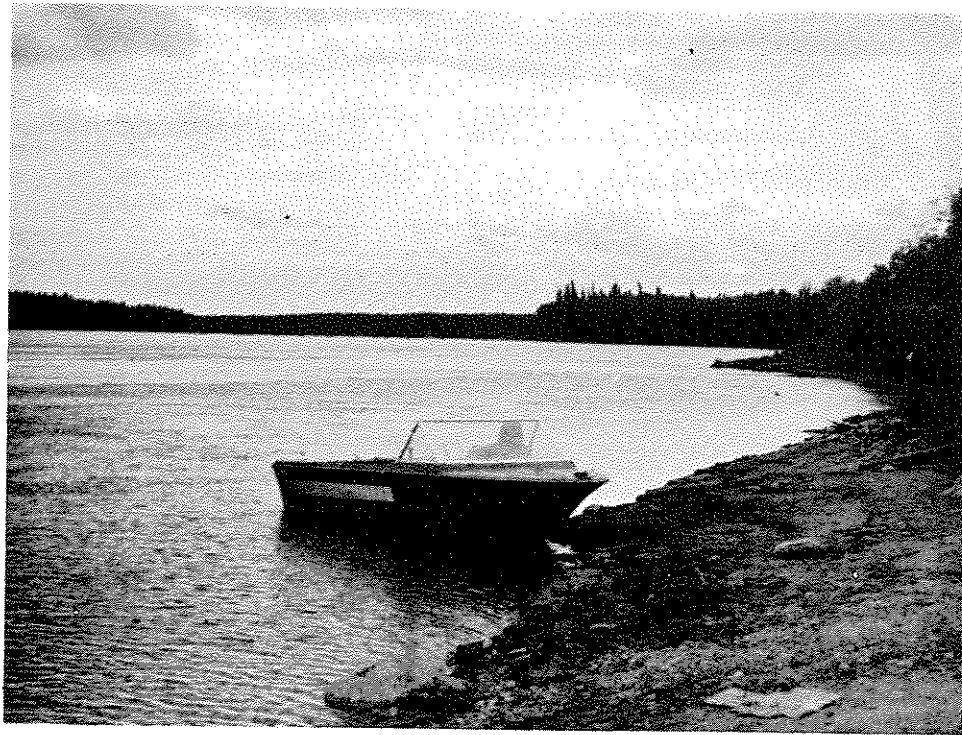
I went for a skidoo ride and I went a long way. Then I was going home and I stopped to stretch. I looked behind me and I saw a Sasquach. I took a gun out but he never made a move, because he was eating. I shot up in the air and he ran away. The Rangers were nearby and they came and asked me what was the matter. I said there was a Sasquach here. The Ranger got scared. I met the Sasquach again and he came up to me and took my hand and shook it. He hugged me and we were friends from then on.

N.B. To the authors the Sasquach is a sort of boogeyman, a stranger to the village, usually a white man.

THE DAY I MET THE SASQUACH

Once I went in the bush and I saw a Sasquach and I ran away. The Sasquach saw me and started to chase me. I ran behind a tree. We both got scared of each other and then we made friends and we went to a cave. It was his cave. He had a candle for light and we went to kill a bear. He saw a bear and killed it and he took the bear into the cave. The Sasquach came and gave me raw bear meat and I refused to eat it and then he went out and I went home and I never saw the Sasquach again.





RIVER BANKS

Water hits swiftly
 Back on the river banks
 Mud falls quickly
 Water turns black
 Then the mud goes away
 Water comes back to natural colour



Treaty Day Teepee

SUMMER

Summer for its hot
 For the sky is burning red
 Now its blowing wind



Smoke House



MY POEM

I am an ape
An ape is hairy and furry
And climbs trees

Another ape moves in
We don't like him
That ape is not furry like us.

MY FRIEND

Charles is my friend.
He has black hair,
Big mouth, doesn't listen
Brown jacket and vest.
He has a big nose and
Big black ears as big as a cow.
No teeth.

FLOWERS

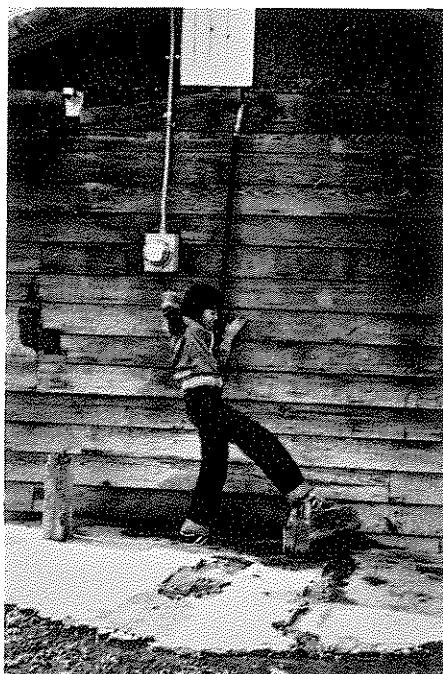
The softness of the carnation,
The sweetness of the pollen,
The fragrance of the rose,
And the beauty of the dandelions
Make the world beautiful.

BLUEBERRIES

Blueberries are juicy blue
They come once every summer
They are very tasteful

FLOWERS

Flowers drop slowly
They vanish to the dry earth
They fall when the sun dies.



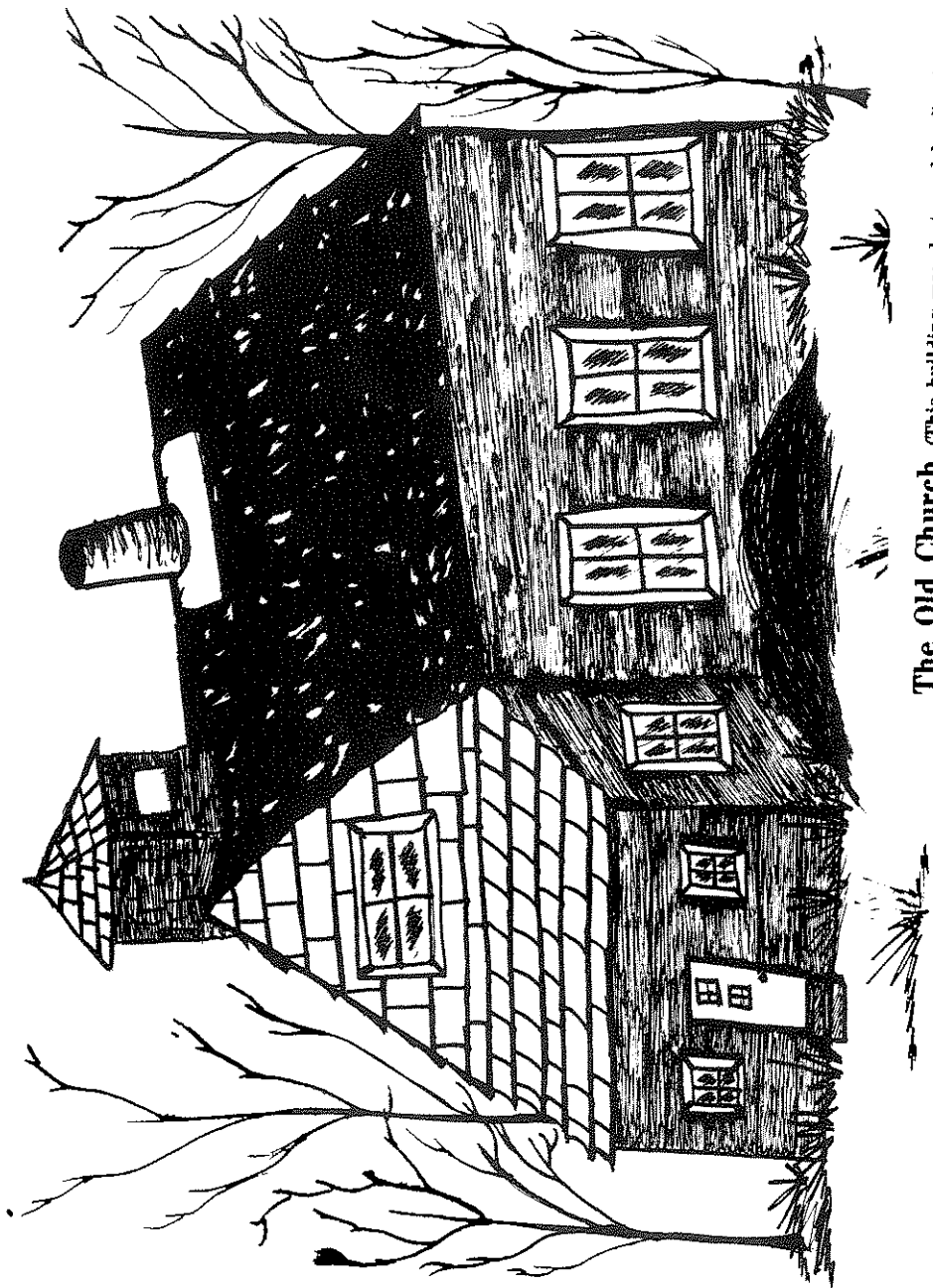
SCENES

AROUND

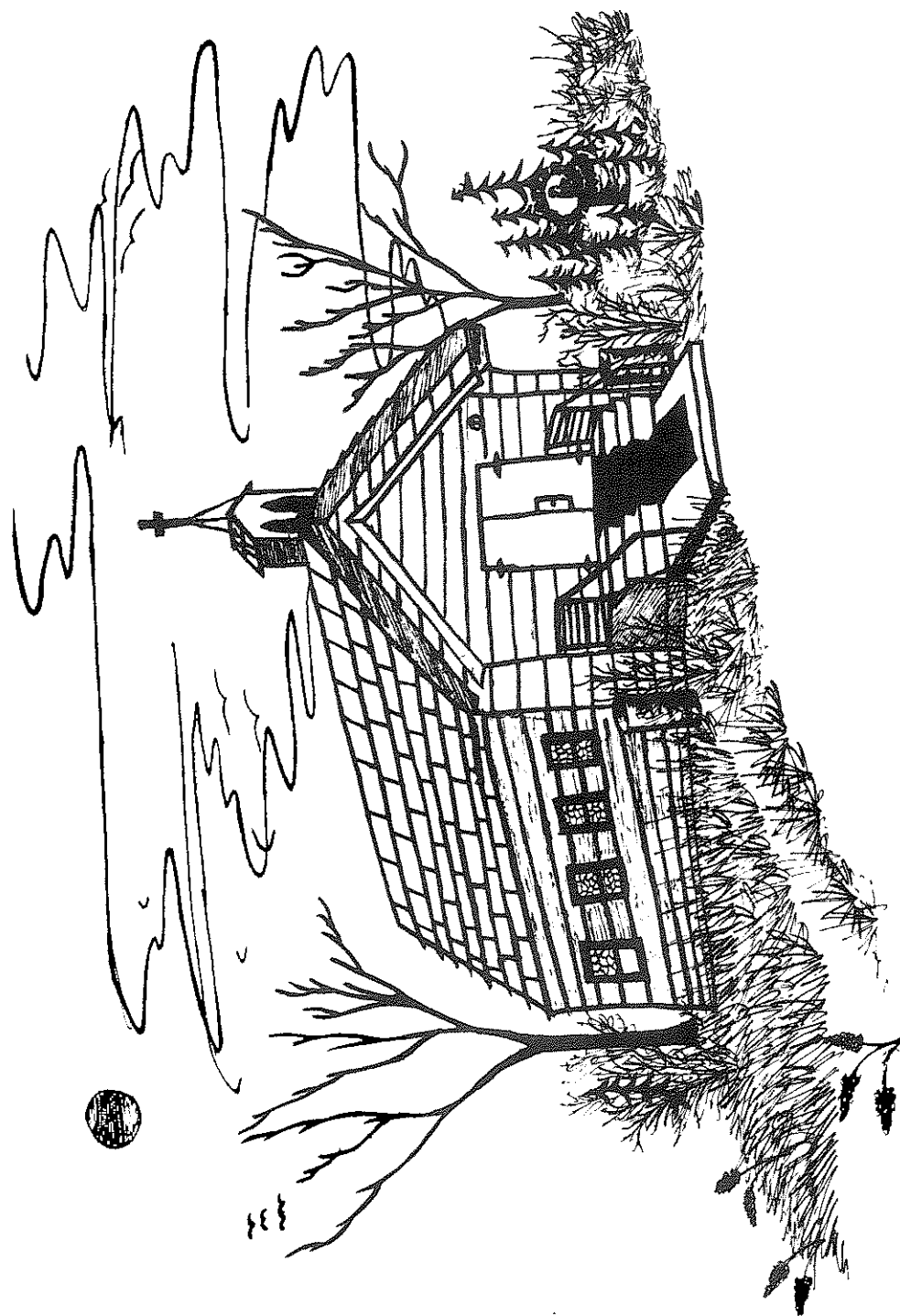
McKAY

McKAY

McKay is a nice place,
Where some people stay:
Some people don't like it
But I don't know why,
I guess they're very shy,
There is always a black cloud
In the sky.



The Old Church (This building was destroyed by fire in 1980.)





Preparing a Moose Hide

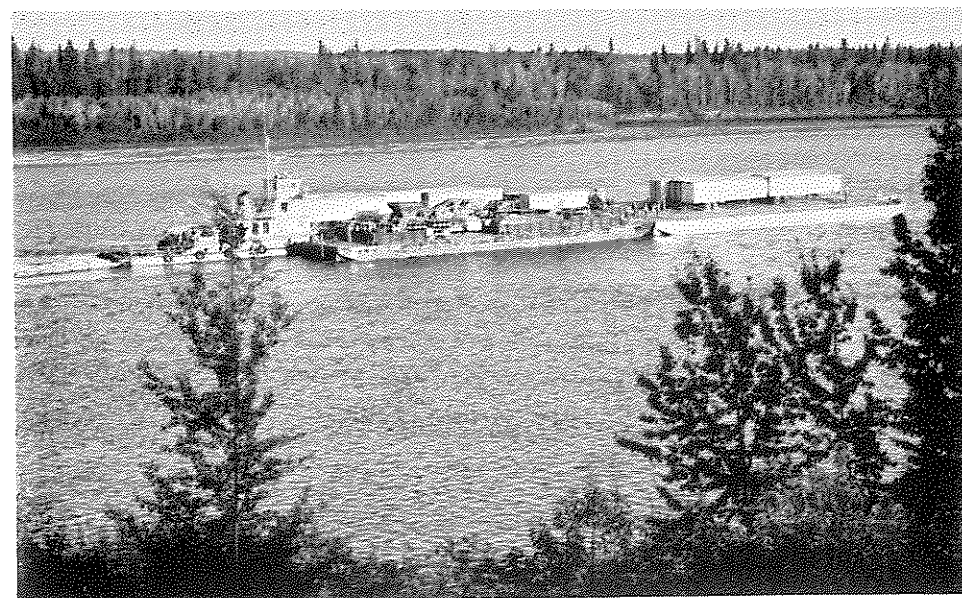


MOOSE

Moose
Big, Strong
Running, Eating, Fighting
Scared, Hungry, Mad, Fierce
Moose



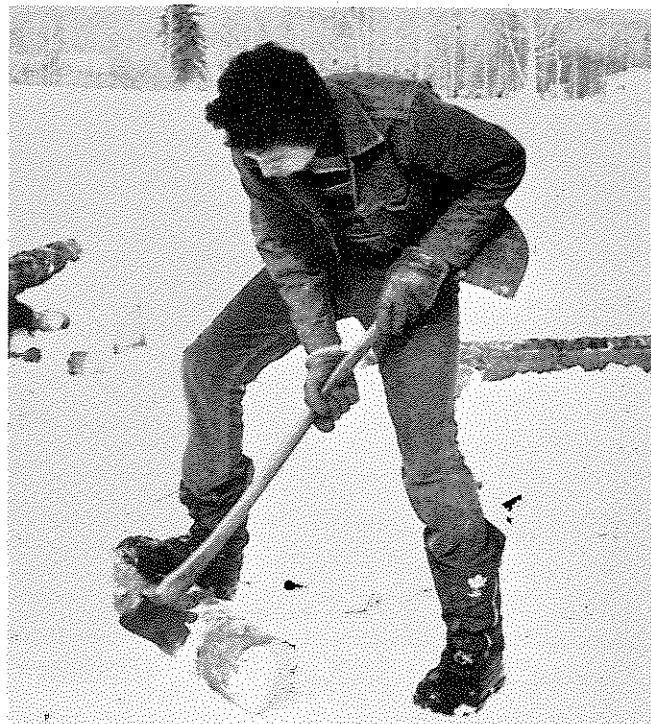
Fleshing Beaver



Barge Passing by Fort McKay on the Athabasca River.



Fort McKay Winter Carnival 1980



SCENES FROM THE PAST



Fur Buyers at Fort McKay (1919)



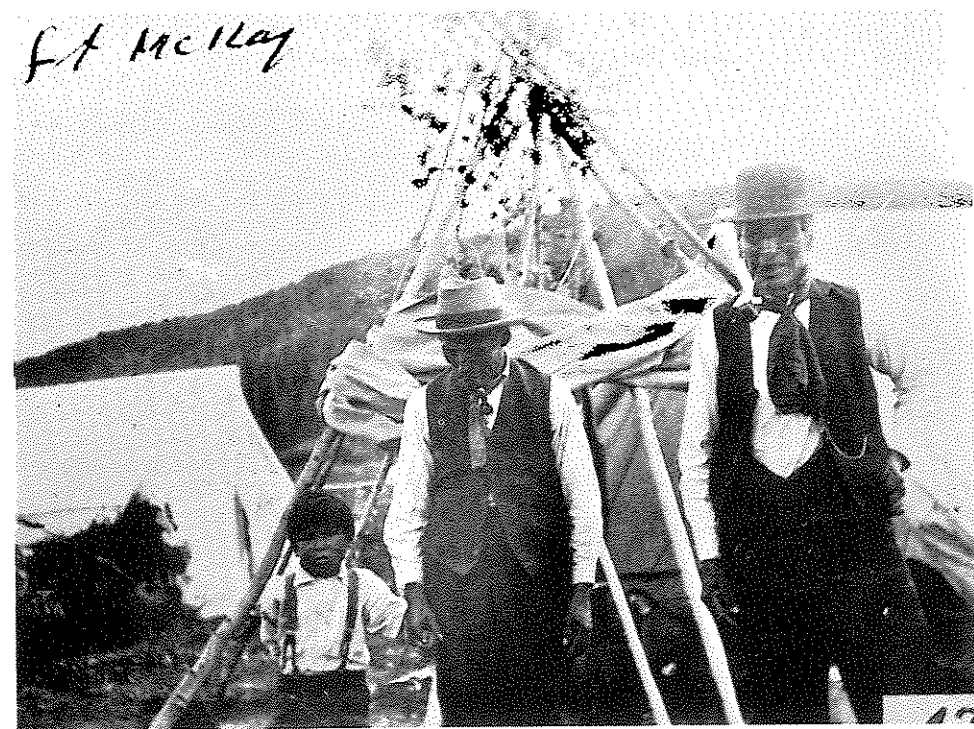
**-photos courtesy of
Emma Faichney**

Photographs Taken Near Fort McKay (1951)



Trappers at Fort McKay (1919)

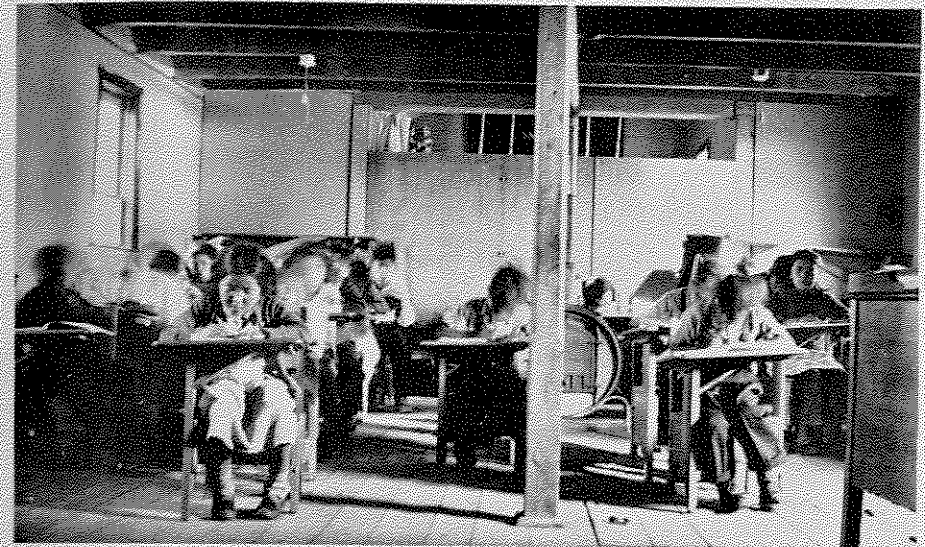
**-photos courtesy
Dept. of Geology
U. of Alberta Archives**



At Fort McKay (1916)

-photos courtesy of
Provincial Archives

First school in Fort McKay
(1949)



Photos Courtesy of Father Begin